

ABOUT BOOKS

The Ploughmen

By Kim Zupan

Published 2014 by Henry Holt and Company, New York, NY

\$26 hardcover

An old man who has murdered scores of victims and a young deputy, haunted by his mother's suicide and his wife's betrayal, spend night after night in the Copper County jail. Bound by mutual insomnia, they pass words through the bars.

It's not quite friendship because, as Valentine Millimaki notes, "I don't know if you can be friends with somebody you think might cut your throat if the opportunity arose."

But John Gload, with a predator's keen nose for weakness, builds a bond with his jailer. "I don't know that I have a thing you'd call a soul, Val, but I recognize it in other people. You have such a thing. I seen it smudged across your face the very first time I seen you."

Kim Zupan's stark, elegant debut evokes a raw, implacable landscape and surprising empathy, both for the young man, who roams the hills and river breaks looking for dead bodies, and for the seasoned killer.

"He tried to reconcile the avuncular old man tendering comfort and counsel from his dark cage with the creature who could placidly dismember a fellow human being ... The distance from reason to rage is short, a frontier as thin as parchment and as frail, restraining the monster. It was there in everyone, he thought. It was there in himself."

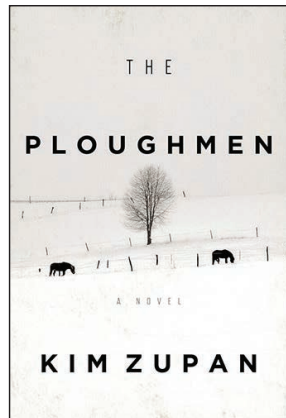
His wife sees Valentine as a stranger, consumed by ghosts, and blames him for leaving her alone in their cabin in the Little Belt Mountains. "But alone here I'm no more important than a bird or a tree ... this place is swallowing me up," she tells him.

Zupan has crafted an intimate, hypnotic novel that delves into the unraveling of a marriage, the thin divide between protector and destroyer, and our own reluctance to face death.

The author grew up in and around Great Falls, and it shows in the way he wraps his language around the landscape: "branches so high the ragged April scud seemed caught there like wisps of tapestry, a high circling bird caged in a wickerwork of pale spring bud."

The author earned his MFA from The University of Montana, and teaches carpentry at Missoula College. He's also worked as a smelterman, pro-rodeo cowboy, ranch hand and salmon fisherman. *Library Journal* calls his first novel "startlingly beautiful" and *The New York Times* lauds it as "a dark and imaginative debut."

— Kristi Niemeyer



How Ice Cream Saved

Missoula

By Michael Orford

Published 2014 by Chocolate and Bicycles Media, Missoula, MT

\$16.99 softcover

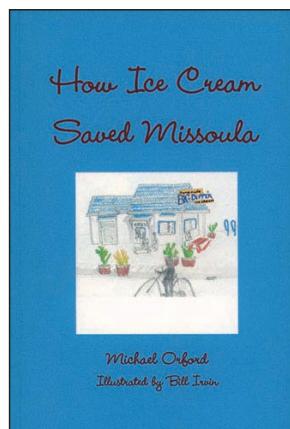
Michael Orford has penned a unique, create-your-own adventure that takes readers to many of Missoula's best-loved landmarks. "Don't read this book front to back," he suggests. "It is not a normal book, just like I am not a normal author." Instead, he advises readers to choose their own experiences as they pedal around Missoula, ice-cream cone in hand and dog Sam alongside.

Orford takes readers to many Garden City attractions, beginning with his favorite ice-cream purveyor, The Big Dipper. At the Carousel for Missoula, readers mount their favorite steeds and ride off into an imaginary primeval forest where adventure awaits. Imagine outwitting an ogre in Greenough Park, or being confronted by a troll on the pedestrian bridge to the university! Readers control their destiny by selecting their own fanciful endings.

Ride along, and have some fun with this puzzle/game book as you turn pages back and forth to an ending where "... they all lived happily ever after." Drawings by Bill Irvin illustrate the book.

Orford is an avid puzzle solver and game player. He lives in Missoula, eats as much ice cream as his wife will let him, and rides his bike everyday looking for adventure.

— Judy Shafter



Grey Dog Big Sky

By Sheryl Noethe

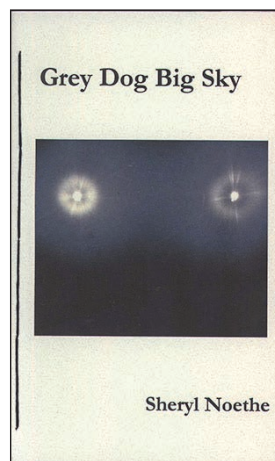
Published 2013 by FootHills Publishing, Kanona, NY

\$16 softcover

Buses rumble through the former Montana poet laureate's latest collection. We imagine her scribbling as she rolls along, collecting fragments of conversation, sketching travelers ("a brooding anarchist from Portland, puffy, and pale./ a handsome kid just out of jail from Seattle./ young woman with both upper and lower lips pierced"), the landscape, the surprising intimacy.

The children she's taught poetry to for decades also show up, often in heart-breaking ways. "Remember when words once held us rapt in vast possibility?/ A half-circle on the carpet around me, wiggling and twisting./ urgent with the need to sketch each letter, make ideas/ into words, electrified."

Like these kids (surely she's inspired thousands by now), she finds in writ-



ing the freedom "to change the narrative, delete, or select all, to open/ a new window and then another." *Grey Dog Big Sky* unfolds like that, window upon window, revealing flowers, lovers, dreams, and heroines (the scientist Marie Curie, the Burmese dissident Aung San Suu Kyi). This bracing, big-hearted collection struggles with war, wishes for us its antidote, and shows – like boarding a Greyhound bus at twilight – "when the poem comes unrolling unbidden./ it's never from where you would expect."

Craig Czury, editor of the Montana Poets Series, writes in the preface, "the look on the face of these poems will bring you to a stop."

Noethe, who served as the state's poet laureate from 2011-2013, is co-founder of the Missoula Writing Collaborative. She's received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Montana Arts Council and won the William Stafford Prize for Poetry. This is her fifth collection.

— Kristi Niemeyer

Wayfaring Stranger

By James Lee Burke

Published 2014 by Simon and Schuster, New York, NY

\$27.99 hardcover

James Lee Burke dips back to the Dust Bowl and World War II in his latest novel, which opens with 16-year-old Weldon Avery Holland's brief but memorable encounter with infamous bank robbers Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow. "Pretend we came with the dust and went with the wind," Bonnie advises him. Instead, he winds up planting a bullet in the rear window of their Chevrolet.

Holland becomes a second lieutenant in World War II, and barely escapes the Battle of the Bulge with his sergeant, Hershel Pine, "a yeoman and a solid fellow, with far more humanity in him than he is aware of." They trudge across an apocalyptic landscape, trapped behind enemy lines, and rescue a young Jewish woman, Rosita Lowenstein, from the remains of an extermination camp.

When the war ends, the trio remains bound together by love and loyalty: Weldon and Rosita as husband and wife, and Hershel as partner in a company that crafts pipelines, using German technology. Business booms as gas and oil production take off in Texas and Louisiana, but a sinister cabal tries to undermine their reputations and livelihoods. Rosita is branded a communist; a Hollywood producer seduces Hershel's wife; and the two men's war records come into question.

Peacetime America, post-WWII, is hardly peaceful in Burke's latest. But unlike his usual array of malevolent characters, the interplay between good and evil is tucked away, harbored by wealth, fueled by jealousy and anti-Semitism. "It's the way of the world," says financier and aviator Roy Wiseheart. "We're wayfaring strangers. We're born alone, we die alone."

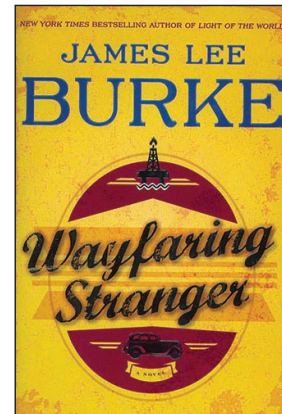
For the implacably honest Holland and his remarkable Rosita, the legend of Bonnie and Clyde comes full circle. This rich and robust story careens through a pivotal time in history with the author's customary insight and storytelling prowess intact.

"If I could draw any conclusion about the long, depressing slog of human progress," reflects the narrator, "it's the possibility that unseen elements lie just on the other side of the physical universe, and that somehow we're actors on the stage of the Globe ..."

Kirkus Review finds in the story "a new spaciousness married to his fine-tuned sense of retribution."

Burke, who lives in Missoula, has accrued two Edgar Awards during his lengthy career and was named Grand Master by the Mystery Writers of America.

— Kristi Niemeyer



Healy's West, The Life and Times of John J. Healy

By Gordon E. Tolton

Published 2014 by Mountain Press Publishing, Missoula, MT

\$20 softcover

Author and historian Gordon Tolton offers a fresh look at one of Montana's early journalists and lawmen in his new book. Thirteen-year-old John J. Healy arrived in New York City in 1853 with his parents and siblings, part of a wave of Irish immigrants. At 18, he enlisted in the Army and went west with his unit to protect settlers traveling on the Oregon Trail.

After his discharge from military service, he began what seemed "his true life." "I am never so happy," Healy wrote, "as when on a good horse traveling light, my rifle, a bed roll, a coffee pot and frying pan, a bit of sugar, salt, flour, tea and coffee and (having to) rustle my meat."

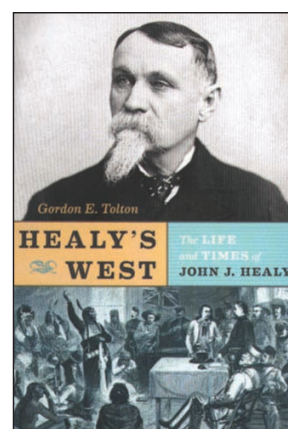
Healy was small in stature, but tough, wiry and smart. He proved himself over and over in a series of hazardous occupations, working as a scout, a gold miner, a merchant, and a fur trader. He started a newspaper, served as sheriff of Chouteau County in the 1870s, and spent many happy years raising a family and building up a trading post in the Sun River country near Fort Benton.

In 1885, Healy headed to Alaska where he met with great success as a fur trader and supplier of goods to the legions of miners smitten with gold fever. He even sought to connect Alaska with Russia via railroad, but after that venture failed, the restless and aging entrepreneur settled in San Francisco, where he passed away in 1908.

For most of his life, Healy was a willing subject for journalists and thus quite a good account of his experiences can be found in many books and articles. Tolton has used these resources extensively to craft a fine biography of a fascinating character whose life is threaded through the events that shaped the American West.

An amateur historian and re-enactor, Tolton is the author of five previous books, and has been associated with the Fort Whoop-Up National Historic Site in Alberta, Canada, for 22 years.

— Judy Shafter



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